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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (CHARACTERS RT MARGIN CORRECTED)

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SUBJECT: MFA EXPRESSES SUPPORT FOR AFGHAN RECONSTRUCTION

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Alice G. Wells for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a July 30 meeting, MFA Afghanistan Deputy Director Khokhlov noted his office's support for two OSCE border guard initiatives, suggesting that GOR reservations were driven more by its broader unhappiness with the OSCE. Khokhlov undertook to make another bureaucratic push for the OSCE initiatives, but highlighted that funding and Afghanistan capacity would be evaluated closely. Noting the need to confirm dates for U.S.-Russian consultations on assistance to the Afghanistan National Army (ANA), Khokhlov underscored that Russia already has assistance monies budgeted for the effort, but needs confidence that Afghanistan wants, needs, and can effectively use and protect the Russian mix of donations and sales. Russia does not see Afghanistan as a profitable export market; rather, some commercial sales are seen as a litmus test of Afghanistan's serious intent to use Russian donations. Medvedev and Karzai are expected to meet at the SCO Summit in Dushanbe on August **¶28**. Despite Karzai's weaknesses, Russia still judges him the most acceptable national politician, and downplays real Iranian influence in Afghanistan. End Summary.

The GOR View of OSCE Projects For Afghanistan

¶2. (C) In a July 30 meeting, MFA Deputy Director for Afghanistan Yuriy Khokhlov reaffirmed GOR interest in utilizing all appropriate international organizations, including the OSCE, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), to rebuild and secure Afghanistan, noting FM Lavrov's July 22 statement that international organizations share this goal and should work together.

¶3. (C) Pushed to explain GOR reservations on two of the OSCE's 16 projects focused on Afghanistan, Khokhlov suggested that Russian reservations might be less a function of the projects themselves than a signal of Russian political unhappiness with the OSCE as an institution. (Note: GOR frustration with the OSCE has been mounting, with Russia's permanent representative to NATO Dmitriy Rogozin complaining on July 29 that the organization was "not doing what it is supposed to be doing.") The reservations, he added, did not stem with the MFA Afghanistan office, which was supportive of the border guard programs. Acknowledging our arguments that the programs exemplified the expanded cooperation on Afghanistan endorsed by the CTWG, Khokhlov undertook to make another bureaucratic push within the MFA. Khokhlov stressed, however, that there would be close scrutiny of the funding

and stating that OSCE extra budgetary contributions would pay for them was not a satisfactory answer for the MFA. With the MFA submitting its next three-year budget request to the Ministry of Finance in September, any plus-ups in assistance needed to be factored into forecasts now.

Securing Afghanistan's Borders

¶4. (C) Noting the proliferation of border training projects, Khokhlov argued that the OSCE, Germany, the UK, and the United States needed to coordinate the training of Afghan border guards more carefully. "The Afghans cannot be pulled in four different directions if they are to learn how to fight drug smuggling," he said. Khokhlov downplayed the Afghan government's ability to prioritize its own training needs, noting endemic corruption, which Khokhlov conceded that Russian troops had not been effective in circumventing, would continue to bedevil border guard effectiveness. Expressing appreciation for U.S. support for the MOI's Domodedova border guard training program (under the auspices of the NATO-Russia Council), Khokhlov welcomed the Afghan government's decision to once again send participants, but lamented Afghanistan's failure to send any students to the facility for three consecutive classes, repeating that the GOR "would not beg for students."

Assisting the Afghan National Army

¶5. (C) Khokhlov stressed that the Russian MOD has included military aid to Afghanistan in its budget: funding was not an issue. Khokhlov said that the GOR has plenty of weapons systems sitting in storage facilities that the ANA could have, but said Russia first had to know how the ANA would use the items. Khokhlov maintained that Russia had been disappointed by Afghanistan's failure to use previous contributions. Among an extended list of examples, Khokhlov listed the 2003 GOR renovation of the radar systems at Kabul Airport, which were not used until 2005, forcing planes to land in the interim using visual markers. Saying that the GOR did not want a repeat of past experiences (and not mentioning Afghanistan complaints of substandard or decrepit in-kind contributions), Khokhlov said the GOR wanted to work with both the U.S. and Afghan authorities on appropriate contributions. Trilateral coordination was essential, he commented, to ensure that the weapons delivered are those that are needed, as well as to build confidence that the weapons and supplies will not fall into the hands of terrorists or be redirected against Russia. Khokhlov added that the GOR looked forward to MinDef Wardak's visit to Moscow in October to discuss such issues.

¶7. (C) With respect to appropriate equipment donations, Khokhlov was skeptical of certain Afghan desiderata and leery of future NATO intentions. The GOR questioned whether the ANA needed high-tech sniper rifles (or could protect them from falling into Taliban or terrorist hands) or rocket-propelled grenades in the absence of any Taliban heavy armor. Given Afghanistan's status as an incubator for various terrorist organizations, Russia had a strategic interest in ensuring that the ANA had the capacity to enforce end-user controls. Pushing for confirmation of the dates for the U.S.-Russia consultations in September, Khokhlov reinforced Russia's interest in learning the long-term strategy for developing the ANA. Russia did not want to provide equipment if, in fact, the U.S. was intent on making Afghanistan NATO-compatible. He also urged the U.S. not to "hinder" the process by telling Afghanistan to use only NATO-compatible equipment.

¶8. (C) Finally, Khokhlov clarified that Russian interest in coupling military donations with commercial sales stemmed from its belief that the Afghans tended to look a gift horse in the mouth: if the Afghans were prepared to pay for some of

the equipment, Russia would be convinced that they needed it.

Khokhlov bridled at the suggestion that Russian interest in commercial sales to Afghanistan would be viewed skeptically at a time of soaring Russian oil and gas revenue.

Economically devastated Afghanistan, Khokhlov stressed, did not factor into any Russian calculus of commercial gain.

However, the experience of donating equipment that was then squandered had forced Russia to recalculate how to judge Afghanistan seriousness in acquiring military hardware.

Khokhlov expressed the hope that international efforts would shift responsibility to the ANA for taking the fight to the enemy, rather than serving as an "auxiliary force."

Karzai The Compromise Figure

19. (C) Khokhlov expected Medvedev to meet Karzai at the SCO Summit in Dushanbe on August 28, although the bilateral had yet to be scheduled. He said the GOR had known Afghan President Karzai since 1994 and, despite his weaknesses, still considered him to be the best compromise candidate for president. While an attractive face to the international community, Russia judged that Karzai had failed to meet expectations in leading the country. Khokhlov downplayed Iranian influence in Afghanistan, noting that while Iran enjoyed political levers in Herat, it had little influence over members of the National Front and virtually none over Karzai. Iranian interests in checking the influx of narcotics were real, and Khokhlov positively appraised Iranian development and infrastructure projects.

RUBIN